

26. (New) The system of claim 23, wherein the phase shifting mask is selected from the group consisting of: an alternating phase shifting mask and an attenuating phase shifting mask.

27. (New) A system, comprising:

an illuminator;

a phase shifting mask; and

a restrictor adapted to provide off-axis illumination, wherein parameters of the off-axis illumination are optimized to compensate for a phase shift error in the phase shifting mask.

28. (New) The system of claim 27, wherein an image on the phase shifting mask is simulated using various parameters of the off-axis illumination, and wherein collected empirical data from simulations is used to optimize the off-axis illumination parameters.

29. (New) A lithographic system, comprising:

an illuminator adapted for providing a source of light;

a restrictor adapted to provide off-axis illumination;

a phase shifting mask, wherein parameters of the off-axis illumination are optimized to compensate for a phase error in the phase shifting mask; and

an optics lens for focusing light on a photoresist layer that overlies a conductive layer on a substrate.

30. (New) The lithographic system of claim 29, wherein the restrictor is a ring having an inner radius and an outer radius, and wherein light is not passed within the inner radius.

31. (New) The lithographic system of claim 29, wherein the phase shifting mask is selected from the group consisting of: an alternating phase shifting mask and an attenuating phase shifting mask.

32. (New) A system, comprising:

a phase shifting mask having a phase shift error;

an illuminator configured for off-axis illumination;  
wherein the off-axis illumination parameters are optimized to compensate for the effects of the phase shift error;  
wherein the illuminator uses empirical data in optimizing the off-axis illumination parameters; and  
wherein the empirical data is taken from one or more simulations of an image on the attenuating phase shifting mask.

33. (New) The system of claim 32, wherein the phase shifting mask is selected from the group consisting of: an alternating phase shifting mask and an attenuating phase shifting mask.

34. (New) A system, comprising:  
a phase shifting mask having a phase shift error;  
an illuminator configured for off-axis illumination wherein the off-axis illumination parameters are optimized to compensate for the effects of the phase error; and  
a ring located between the phase shifting mask and the illuminator, wherein the ring has an inner radius and an outer radius, and wherein light passes inside the outer radius and outside the inner radius of the ring to the phase shifting mask.

35. (New) The system of claim 34, wherein the phase shifting mask is selected from the group consisting of: an alternating phase shifting mask and an attenuating phase shifting mask.

36. (New) An illuminator for a lithographic system, comprising:  
a light source for providing light; and  
a restrictor for providing off-axis illumination, wherein the restrictor provides means for optimizing parameters of the off-axis illumination to compensate for a phase error in a phase shifting mask.

37. (New) The illuminator of claim 36, wherein the restrictor is a ring having an inner radius and an outer radius, and wherein light is not passed within the inner radius.

38. (New) The illuminator of claim 36, wherein the phase shifting mask is selected from the group consisting of: an alternating phase shifting mask and an attenuating phase shifting mask.

39. (New) An illuminator, comprising:  
a light source for providing light; and  
a restrictor, wherein the restrictor provides means for optimizing printing of a phase shifting mask.

40. (New) A method, comprising:  
providing a phase shifting mask;  
providing off-axis illumination;  
simulating an image on the phase shifting mask; and  
adjusting parameters of the off-axis illumination.

41. (New) The method of claim 40, further comprising collecting empirical data from one or more image simulations.

42. (New) The method of claim 40, wherein the phase shifting mask is selected from the group consisting of: an alternating phase shifting mask and an attenuating phase shifting mask.

43. (New) A method of optimizing printing of a phase shifting mask having a phase error, the method comprising:  
configuring an illuminator for off-axis illumination;  
performing one or more simulations of an image on the phase shifting mask, including:  
varying a depth of focus of the image on the phase shifting mask, wherein  
varying the depth of focus includes changing an inner radius of a ring and  
changing an outer radius of the ring, the ring located between the illuminator and  
the phase shifting mask, such that a light source from the illuminator passes inside  
the outer radius and outside the inner radius of the ring to the phase shifting mask;  
and

varying sigma in and sigma out parameters corresponding to the illuminator; and

adjusting off-axis illumination parameters based upon the one or more simulations.

44. (New) The method of claim 43, wherein the phase shifting mask is selected from the group consisting of: an alternating phase shifting mask and an attenuating phase shifting mask.

45. (New) A method of optimizing printing of a phase shifting mask having a phase error, the method comprising:

providing the phase shifting mask having a phase shift error;

providing off-axis illumination;

performing one or more simulations on an image of the phase shifting mask, including varying a depth of focus of the image on the phase shifting mask and including varying sigma in and sigma out parameters; and

providing a means for controlling the light source to optimize printing of the phase shifting mask based upon the one or more simulations.

46. (New) The method of claim 46, wherein the phase shifting mask is selected from the group consisting of: an alternating phase shifting mask and an attenuating phase shifting mask.

47. (New) A method of printing an image from a phase shifting mask at two different wavelengths, the method comprising:

providing the phase shifting mask;

providing an I-line light source at a first wavelength;

printing the image on the phase shifting mask;

providing a deep ultra-violet (UV) light source at a second wavelength;

configuring the UV light source for off-axis illumination;

performing one or more simulations of the image on the phase shifting mask, including:

varying a depth of focus of the image on the phase shifting mask; and

varying sigma in and sigma out parameters;

adjusting off-axis illumination parameters based upon the one or more simulations; and printing the image on the phase shifting mask.

48. (New) The method of claim 47, wherein the phase shifting mask is selected from the group consisting of: an alternating phase shifting mask and an attenuating phase shifting mask.

49. (New) A method of printing an image from a phase shifting mask using an illuminator operating at a different wavelength from what the mask was initially designed for, the method comprising:

providing the phase shifting mask;

providing the illuminator having a light source;

configuring the illuminator for off-axis illumination;

performing one or more simulations of the image on the phase shifting mask, including:

varying a depth of focus of the image on the phase shifting mask; and

varying sigma in and sigma out parameters corresponding to the illuminator;

adjusting off-axis illumination parameters based upon the one or more simulations; and

printing the image on the phase shifting mask.

50. (New) The method of claim 49, wherein the phase shifting mask is selected from the group consisting of: an alternating phase shifting mask and an attenuating phase shifting mask.

51. (New) A method of compensating for a phase error in a phase shifting mask, comprising:

providing off-axis illumination;

simulating an image on the phase shifting mask; and

adjusting parameters for the off-axis illumination based upon one or more image simulations.

52. (New) The method of claim 51, wherein providing off-axis illumination includes providing:

a light source; and

a restrictor ring for controlling the light source.

53. (New) The method of claim 51, wherein providing off-axis illumination includes providing:

a light source; and

a restrictor sigma in and a restrictor sigma out for controlling the light source.

54. (New) The method of claim 51, wherein providing off-axis illumination includes providing:

an illuminator; and

an adjustment on the illuminator for controlling the light source.

55. (New) The method of claim 51, wherein simulating an image includes:

varying a depth of focus of the image on the phase shifting mask; and

varying sigma in and sigma out parameters.

56. (New) The method of claim 51, wherein the phase shifting mask is selected from the group consisting of: an alternating phase shifting mask and an attenuating phase shifting mask.

57. (New) A system, comprising:

an illuminator;

a restrictor adjustment on the illuminator wherein light from the illuminator is varied with respect to an optical axis; and

a phase shifting mask, wherein the restrictor adjustment on the illuminator compensates for a phase shift error in the phase shifting mask.

58. (New) The system of claim 57, wherein the phase shifting mask is selected from the group consisting of: an alternating phase shifting mask and an attenuating phase shifting mask.

59. (New) A system, comprising:  
an illuminator;  
a restrictor ring for varying light from the illuminator with respect to an optical axis; and  
a phase shifting mask, wherein the restrictor ring compensates for a phase shift error in  
the phase shifting mask.

60. (New) The system of claim 59, wherein the phase shifting mask is selected from the  
group consisting of: an alternating phase shifting mask and an attenuating phase shifting mask.

61. (New) A system, comprising:  
an illuminator;  
a restrictor sigma in and a restrictor sigma out for varying light from the illuminator with  
respect to an optical axis; and  
a phase shifting mask, wherein the restrictor sigma in and the restrictor sigma out  
compensates for a phase shift error in the phase shifting mask.

62. (New) The system of claim 61, wherein the phase shifting mask is selected from the  
group consisting of: an alternating phase shifting mask and an attenuating phase shifting mask.

SUPPLEMENTAL PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT

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Claims 23 - 62 are now pending in this application. The Examiner is invited to contact the below-signed attorney at 612-373-6960 to discuss any questions which may remain with respect to the present application.

Respectfully submitted,

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CERTIFICATE UNDER 37 CFR 1.8: The undersigned hereby certifies that this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Postal Service with sufficient postage as first class mail, in an envelope addressed to: Commissioner of Patents, Washington, D.C. 20231, on this 16 day of November, 2000.

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